

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NHL

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DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Glessner House

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER 1800 Prairie Avenue

CITY, TOWN Chicago

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 7th

STATE Illinois

VICINITY OF  
CODE

COUNTY Cook

CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Mrs. Marian Despres, Chairman

STREET & NUMBER The Chicago School of Architecture Glessner House  
1800 South Prairie Avenue

CITY, TOWN Chicago

VICINITY OF

STATE Illinois

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Cook County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER Clark and Washington Streets

CITY, TOWN Chicago

STATE Illinois

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Building Survey OAHPS NPS Department of Interior

DATE 1963

X FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN Washington

STATE DC

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
— HISTORIC	— ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	— COMMUNITY PLANNING	— LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	— RELIGION	
— 1400-1499	— ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	— CONSERVATION	— LAW	— SCIENCE	
— 1500-1599	— AGRICULTURE	— ECONOMICS	— LITERATURE	— SCULPTURE	
— 1600-1699	— ARCHITECTURE	— EDUCATION	— MILITARY	— SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
— 1700-1799	— ART	— ENGINEERING	— MUSIC	— THEATER	
— 1800-1899	— COMMERCE	— EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	— PHILOSOPHY	— TRANSPORTATION	
— 1900-	— COMMUNICATIONS	— INDUSTRY	— POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	— OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		— INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1885-1887 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

H. H. Richardson was the second American architect to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (after Richard Morris Hunt). His earlier works, after returning to Boston in 1865, showed some of the eclecticism that dominated architecture in the second half of the 19th century. Glessner House in Chicago is the product of his mature years - in the early medieval idiom that is still called "Richardsonian-Romanesque." The house for J. J. Glessner, a vice president of International Harvester, is one of his greatest houses - the same details reflect this style - heavy, rough stone courses, rounded arches and turrets.

The house, in the center of Chicago's original Gold Coast is fortress-like on the exterior as it was on an urban site but it was planned so that the family rooms open out into a quiet inner courtyard. Prairie Avenue had been the street of millionaires both before and after the 1871 fire - here lived Pullman, Armour, Kimball and Marshall Field. During the 1920's the area deteriorated and today there are a few ghosts of what was once the most fashionable neighborhood in Chicago. John J. Glessner, an aggressive and successful businessman was also a patron of the arts and well known philanthropist. Both he and his wife were influential in furnishing this house and it must have been Richardson's austere style not his reputation, that drew Glessner to him. The architect gave him a great work of art.

There is a long, fascinating account of the client-architect relationship in an unpublished booklet: The Story of a House by J. J. Glessner (reproduced in HABS records). The Glessner family enjoyed living in the house and cared for it - on their deaths in 1932 they willed the property to the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects but the upkeep forced the sale by the heirs. Several deed transfers occurred and alterations imposed on the interior (1946) but today a restoration is underway.

The memorial pamphlet by Glessner describes his house and the architect that created it in detail: "Simplicity and proportion were the strongest characteristics of his work. The same style and finish go all through this house, from front to back, whether in show places or in obscure places.

Altogether, the house was as well built in every detail as the architect could suggest or as we know how to build, and one great cause for satisfaction was that there was absolutely no bill of extra charges. It was completed for the contract price and no more. There were no labor troubles and no disputes with the builders, Norcross Brothers of Worcester, Massachusetts. 1

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Glessner House

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Glessner's touching record of Richardson's conversation on his death bed with him is worth noting - "I am convinced that this house of ours is the one of all that he built that he would have liked most to live in himself. It was his last work." 2

Richardson's innovations would also be noted as he was an inventive and highly original genius. He was responsible for making windows an integral part of interior design, their size and placement determined by need rather than external symmetry. He transformed the New England cottage into a large, rambling, asymmetrical house in harmony with its site. This very much influenced the young Frank Lloyd Wright. Richardson was also the first American architect to find functional industrial buildings interesting (warehouses, railroad stations, libraries, etc) thus altering the image of the architect as commissioned only by the aristocratic patron. His influence on his contemporaries was enormous. He worked with the painter John LaFarge, the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and the architects Charles F. McKim and Stanford White. Richardson's architecture, however important to Sullivan and Wright, was eclipsed by Burnham and McKim's "White City;" the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

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<sup>1</sup> Glessner, John J. The Story of a House Unpublished, March 1928. Copy in Collection of George R. Mathey, Ipswich, Massachusetts. Transcribed in HABS files.

2

Ibid

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

From the exterior, Glessner House, is massive yet elegant. The foundation is limestone mixed with patches of brick and mortar ending at ground line. The stone-like walls are actually 6 to 8 inch sheets of granite bonded into brick, the courtyard walls are light pink brick with limestone lintels and sills on the windows. The frame interior walls are brick faced with plaster applied on the brick.

The doors are oak with heavy iron strap hinges and latches. Steep pitched gable roofs are covered with terra cotta tiles, the ell roof has copper sheathing.

Since a rare account of the house exists written by Glessner himself it is appropriate to quote: "The courtyard elevation, of common brick of slightly pinkish color, with gray limestone trimmings, is quite as interesting as the street fronts, though in a different way. By special arrangement the same brick was used in the adjoining house, so that all walls of the courtyard are of the same texture and color."

When first built, the house was subject of much remark by passers-by, because of the narrow windows in its north side along 18th Street, just enough to light the narrow corridors, these critics not realizing that on the south side looking on the courtyard, Mr. Richardson had put generous windows that let in a flood of sunlight when the sun shines in Chicago.

All bathroom walls and floors are of white glazed tiles; the back entrance corridor and kitchen walls, and the carriage house and stables (now garage) are of white glazed brick. The heating is from the furnace room under the garage, thus avoiding the dust and dirt and noise of coal and ashes in the house,--a hot water system in it, admirable for the time when it was put in.

Either the floors are deadened or the ceilings doubled, or both, so that sounds do not carry through the house, basement and furnace room ceilings are plastered, and all have cement floors.

The kitchen and pantries are on the main or parlor floor, are well lighted, well ventilated, convenient, easily cleaned; and the small dining room adjoining has its table, its little sideboard, its writing desk. The entrance is through the great arch on Eighteenth Street on the small corridor, and thence to these offices. Also there is convenient access down the basement stairs to the school room, so that it is easy to serve company there.

The tiles in the mantels of the first-floor bedroom, and of the second guest rooms are by William De Morgan, with antique Persian tiles in the dining room, fireplaces and irons are old Colonial and old Continental European, and that in library is old Scotch, all of them found in junk

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shops after they had been taken from old buildings; many of the gas and electric fixtures, wall papers, curtains and carpets, except antique rugs, are by William Morris, and have been renewed from the same patterns when renewal was necessary; yellow glass under chipped white glass in the door leading to the courtyard gives a feeling of sunlight in the hall even in cloudy weather.

Mr. Richardson insisted on one or two small extravagances, fine imported marbles in parlor and hall mantels, imported washbowls from the English factories of Meyer-Sniffen, because more generous in size than those to be had here, silver plate on plumbing fixtures, though nickel would have been cheaper and have given less care, but he agreed with Matthew Arnold in bewailing the common "want of fastidiousness and the proneness to mistake nickel for silver" and would have none of that in this work. He was particular about the stair rail and balusters. Of the latter there are four different patterns, one of each on each step, all slender, graceful fine reproductions from some distinguished old Colonial house, the Longfellow house at Cambridge, if my memory is not at fault--but I distinctly remember that they cost one dollar each.

The furniture in the dining room is from designs by Charles Coolidge; in the drawing room from Francis Bacon's designs--in both cases executed by Davenport; there are some Herter chairs, some Scott bookcases and cabinets and beds (in your mother's bedroom and George's); Francis Bacon's furniture in Frances' room and the main guest room, and in the second guest room a set of typical French furniture bought in Paris. One of the Scott bookcases is the first piece of furniture he designed for us. That was in 1876. We thought then, and still think it beautiful as a single piece." 1

There have been unfortunate interior alterations and the courtyard brick is covered with grime but it is to be hoped that the current restoration will return to its original quality.

<sup>1</sup> Glessner, John J. The Story of a House Unpublished March 1923. Copy in Collection of George R. Mathey Ipswich, Massachusetts Transcribed in HABS files.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	16	448450	4633940	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 39, 40 and the northern 17 feet of lot 38 in Assessor's Division of Southwest Fractional 1/4 of Section 22, Township 39 Norht, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Carolyn Pitts Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey NPS Dept of the Interior

7-30-75

1100 L Street N.W.

STATE

Washington

DC

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Glessner House

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

- Architectural Record, Vol. VI, No. 1 (July-September, 1896, p. 86. Photograph.
- Drury, John. Old Chicago Houses. Chicago: 1941, pp. 44-48
- Glessner, John J. Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgotten?
- Glessner, John J. The Story of a House Unpublished 1923.
- Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times.  
Revised edition, Hamden: 1961, pp. 267, 271, 277-278, and 328-330.
- The Inland Architect and Builder. Vol. XI, No. I, Photograph section
- Meeker, Arther. Prairie Avenue. New York: 1949.
- Mumford, Lewis. The Brown Decades. New York: 1931, p. 120.
- Olgarman, James F. H. H. Richardson and his office Howard University Press 1974.
- Pickens, Buford. "H. H. Richardson and Basic Form Concepts in Modern  
Architecture," The Art Quarterly. Vol. III (1940), pp. 273-291.
- Scully, Vincent J. Jr. The Shingle Style. New Haven: 1955, p. 98.
- Schuyler, Montgomery. American Architecture and Other Essays. Edited by  
William H. Jordy and Ralph Coe, Cambridge: 1961, pp. 283-285.
- Van Rensselaer, Mrs. Schuyler. H. H. Richardson and His Work. Boston:  
1888, p. 109.
- Van Zanten, David T. "H. H. Richardson's Glessner House, Chicago 1886-1887,"  
Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Vol. XXIII (May, 1964),  
pp. 107-111.

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

✓ CK-H-61  
960524

1. Name of Site:

Common

Historic Glessner House

2. Location:

Street and Number

1800 S. Prairie Ave.  
City or Town

Chicago  
County

Cook

Zip Code

Township

Range

Section

1/4 Section

3. Classification:

Category (check one)

- District       Building  
 Site             Structure

Integrity (check one)

- Altered             Unaltered  
 Moved             Original Site

4. Ownership:

- Private  
 Public

Status (check one)

- Occupied  
 Unoccupied  
 Preservation work in progress

Access to Public

- Yes       Restricted       Unrestricted       No

Present Use (check one or more)

- Agricultural                             Industrial                             Religious  
 Commercial                             Military                             Scientific  
 Educational                             Museum                             Transportation  
 Entertainment                             Park                             Other  
 Government                             Private Residence

5. Ownership of Property:

Owner's Name

Chicago School of Arch. Foundation

Phone Number

Street and Number

City or Town

State

County

Zip Code

ARCHITECTURE

6. Description: Richardsonian

- Excellent             Good             Fair             Deteriorated  
 Ruins             Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway?

- Yes             No



7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Site         | (Pre-Columbian)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Site         | (Post-Columbian to 1673) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French Influence           | (1673-1780)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Frontier          | (1780-1818)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Early             | (1818-1850)              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illinois Middle | (1850-1900)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Late              | (1900-present)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Famous People              | (give names & dates)     |

8. Specific Date: 1886

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (historic)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (pre-historic) | <input type="checkbox"/> Military            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture               | <input type="checkbox"/> Music               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication             | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation              | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry       | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture    |  |

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates) H.H. Richardson designed Use additional sheets if necessary. for John Glessner, executive of International Harvesting Richardson's only remaining residence in Chicago. Nat'l Register. Included in Prairie

9. Form prepared by: Ave. Historic District., Chicago Landmarks Commission, Landmarks

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 6/23/75

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number: \_\_\_\_\_

City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

Robertson, Robert, Of Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.  
National Register material

